

The 5 P's: Meaningful Classroom Rules

Be **Positive**, **Productive**, **Polite**, **Prepared**, and **ResPectful**.



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By Lisa Koplík



Whenever a classroom appears on a television show, in a magazine, or in a fictional book, kids are often portrayed as quiet, calm, seated, and absolutely thrilled to be learning. We, as teachers, recognize that this scenario is very much the exception to the rule—and that it might even strike fear into our hearts as to what the kids could possibly be up to!

That being said, it seems society expects kids to adhere to a set of universal classroom rules. If we all share certain standards of behavior for our children, why not set that expectation clearly and firmly by creating, explaining, and practicing rules that really *mean* something?

I'm here to tell you about the five P's in my classroom: **Be Positive, Productive, Polite, Prepared, and ResPectful.**

In order to create a **culture** that emphasizes personal responsibility, safety, and kindness in my fourth-grade classroom, I do feel it is my duty to help explicitly teach kids what these things look like. By fourth grade, if kids don't know that teachers expect them to raise their hands, pay attention, and do work, then we've got a problem. I state this to my students on Day One, making sure that they understand that I expect a certain level of behavior from them at all times and that my expectations are non-negotiable. After this is made absolutely clear, we move on to a discussion of classroom rules—together. I make this a conversation rather than a lecture because when class rules are simply prescribed to students, they feel no sense of ownership and are less likely to comply. Additionally, when class rules sit up on the wall and are never discussed after the first day, they lose their meaning.

The class rules I have chosen are more than just guidelines for students in a classroom: they are rules that I truly believe people of all ages should adhere to in their daily lives. When a teacher values and lives by the rules he or she sets for the class, the rules feel more authentic and can be discussed in a more legitimate way. I could have a five-minute conversation with my students about behavioral expectations, or I could have an ongoing conversation with them about the five distinct rules everyone should live by. Which have you done in the past? Which would you choose for the future?

Related Resource: [Students' Contributions to the Rules](#)

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Let's start off with an explanation of each rule, followed by some tips about how to enforce their validity in the classroom and in life.

1. Be Positive.

Some teachers may read this and say, "That's not really a RULE," but think about your kids. "Ugh, I hate math!" "Why can't we go out for extra recess when her class got to?" "I'm so tired!" We are constantly surrounded by negative talk—not only from our students, but often from ourselves as well. We get so caught up in the work, the grading, or the behavior issues that we forget why we became teachers in the first place. Kids give us life, they give us purpose, and they make us happy. To enforce a rule about keeping a positive attitude provides a daily reminder of our original career motivations, and it helps our kids' attitudes.

Some tips for teaching the "Be Positive" rule:

- Reading and discussing [Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day](#) by Judith Viorst,
- Reading [The Most Magnificent Thing](#) by Ashley Spires and making a chart of "What Can I Say to Myself: Instead of X, Try Thinking Y,"
- Making a chart as a class that highlights the ways they show positivity in and outside of school,
- Modeling what positive versus negative actions, thoughts, and behaviors look like.

Related Resource: [Positive Classroom Behavior](#)

2. Be Productive.

From doing math worksheets to engaging in a discussion to ultimately succeeding in any career, this rule applies so heavily both inside and outside the classroom. I always make sure to begin by clearly explaining the definition of the word "productive" so the kids know what they are agreeing to, and then following up with examples and models of what productivity does and does not look like. And yes, this of course includes a colorful chart.

Related Resource: [What is FutureFit?](#)

3. Be Polite.

We talk so much about being respectful in the classroom and in life (this rule comes later), but I find that school children these days seem to have forgotten what being polite is all about. Some key examples of the things I hear coming out of my students' mouths include, "Ew, what are you eating for snack?" "Why did you go to the nurse?" "Why weren't you here yesterday?" or excessive laughter whenever anything remotely embarrassing happens to someone. None of this is okay, and we should make it known right away that this behavior is straight-up rude. I call my kids out on their rudeness frequently. This is the time! Adults should know better; kids need help. **Remind them how to be polite.**

Related Resource: [30 Do's and Don'ts of Classroom Etiquette for Teachers and Students](#)

4. Be Prepared.

Now, my fourth rule is the one that I find I care about the most in a classroom setting in terms of keeping kids efficiently working on task: Be Prepared (cue *Lion King* music). I talk so frequently about this rule: pointing to it with wide eyes when kids forget homework, jumping up and down by my class rules chart and asking what rule I'm thinking of when someone is quickly ready for math, and so on. Whether we're talking about today, tomorrow, or seventeen years from now, being prepared leads to success. Period. Let's start them young and create good habits for their futures.

Related Resource: [10 Important Study Habits for Students](#)

5. Be ResPectful.

Finally, the golden rule of all classrooms: be respectful to people **and** to property. In my fourth-grade class this year, we implemented new content-based team teaching in which my co-worker and I each teach the same subject twice. I teach both our classes math, and she teaches them reading. This "respect" rule comes heavily into play when kids are in another classroom, using another student's desk and materials, and interacting with a different teacher. By fourth grade, tensions often run high among classmates as they have been with the same crew for years. With younger kids, they simply may not have had many opportunities yet to demonstrate respect in a classroom setting. No matter what age group you teach, this rule comes up so often and must be reinforced frequently.

Related Resource: [Good Citizenship](#)

In my opinion, the most important part of class rules is that they are valued and lived by the teacher, truthfully, in his or her own life.

These rules should be meaningful and reinforced often, not just hung up on the wall and left to collect dust. They should be created in the classroom **with** the kids, not forced upon them. The kids should sign the rules document posted in the classroom. Finally, the rules should serve a purpose in and out of the classroom, to help kids not only be successful students, but successful people.

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